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SUBJECT: WESTERN BALKANS MAJOR THEME OF CODEL VOINOVICH
VISIT TO SLOVENIA

REF: LJUBLJANA 0036

Classified By: CDA Brad Freden reasons 1.4 (b and d)

SUMMARY

1.(C) The Western Balkans dominated discussions in Ljubljana on February 14 between Senators Voinovich (R-OH) and Shaheen (D-NH) and Slovenian leaders, including President Turk, Prime Minister Pahor, Foreign Minister Zbogar and Defense Minister Jelusic. The Senators thanked Slovenia for its leadership in the Western Balkans and called on the Government to continue its efforts to support entry of the former Yugoslav republics and Albania into Euro-Atlantic institutions. Slovenia's leadership was unanimous in stressing the need for the EU to provide visa liberalization for Bosnia prior to the July anniversary of the Srebrenica massacre, and for Sarajevo to join NATO's Membership Action Plan at the April ministerial. Slovenia plans to work with the Bosnians to identify reform "deliverables" prior to the NATO ministerial and the kick-off of the BiH presidential campaign. FM Zbogar highlighted the division of military property and a "joint declaration on a common future" as examples of possible concrete steps BiH could take now to show that it is serious about addressing constitutional reform after the elections.

2.(C) Zbogar expects Croatia to conclude its EU accession negotiations by the end of the year. All were confident that Slovenia's Parliament would ratify the border arbitration agreement, and that Ljubljana's relations with Zagreb would continue their upward trend. Senator Voinovich called opposition leader and former PM Janez Jansa to urge him not to actively oppose the arbitration agreement. On Kosovo, the Slovenes would like to see any further drawdown of KFOR carefully calibrated to the political situation on the ground. Slovenia remains committed to Kosovo's security and will provide additional flexibility to its forces in KFOR as they expand their area of responsibility in the country. Slovenia has good cooperation with Serbia in many areas including defense reform. Voinovich seemed to share PM Pahor's sentiment that "if Croatia joins the EU and Serbia is left behind, all hell will break loose." Turning away from the region, the Senators emphasized the importance of NATO's mission in Afghanistan and thanked the Slovenes for their contributions in support of ISAF. In a private conversation with FM Zbogar, Voinovich said he hoped Slovenia would find a way to accept detainees from Guantanamo. When asked about the absence of an ambassador, the Senators said that they expected a U.S. ambassador would be on the ground in Ljubljana soon, and Shaheen promised to give priority to the confirmation process. END SUMMARY.

BOSNIA: MAP AND VISA LIBERALIZATION

3.(C) The current situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH)

was the main topic of conversation during the CODEL's meetings with the GOS. BiH is one of Slovenia's main foreign policy priorities. Minister of Defense Jelusic stressed the importance of having the international community acknowledge reforms undertaken by the BiH government and its armed forces. Jelusic explained that it was important for BiH to know that the United States was on its side, as the Bosnians trusted the United States more than the EU.

4.(C) Foreign Minister Zbogar warned that frustration was growing as the Bosniaks were increasingly feeling that the international community (IC) was leaving them behind. As a result, he explained the EU needs to maintain momentum on visa liberalization for the region. FM Zbogar noted that the EU took a very positive step by offering visa liberalization to Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro. BiH lost out in this process, and so Zbogar highlighted the urgent need for the EU to offer visa liberalization to the Bosnians prior to the July Srebrenica anniversary. Defense Minister Jelusic also explained the importance of offering MAP to BiH as soon as possible; not only would MAP offer a sign of support from the IC for what BiH has done on defense reforms, but it would also send a signal that Serbia needs to undertake similar reforms. Jelusic cautioned that if momentum was lost in BiH, Serbia could lose its Western orientation.

SERBIA: NEED TO MAINTAIN MOMENTUM

5.(C) The Slovenes would like to see the EU move quickly on Serbia's EU membership application. Pahor put it most bluntly: "If Croatia joins and Serbia is left behind, all hell will break loose." According to FM Zbogar, the GOS is

LJUBLJANA 00000041 002 OF 003

concerned that momentum might be lost for Serbia's further integration into Euro-Atlantic structures if a new government was to come to power in Belgrade. Zbogar called the current government "forward looking," but noted that it was questionable how much longer they could hold on to power. Serbia's EU membership could offer his government a real deliverable that would help maintain the country's Western orientation. Defense Minister Jelusic told the CODEL that Slovenia has good cooperation with Serbia in many areas including on defense.

CROATIA: A NEW POSITIVE MOOD

6.(C) From the President on down, the Slovene leadership assessed that bilateral relations with Croatia have greatly improved since both governments agreed to send the long-standing border dispute to arbitration. Turk praised President Josipovic and especially Prime Minister Kosor for her leadership. Foreign Minister Zbogar told the Senators that he was confident Slovenia's Parliament would ratify the Arbitration Agreement and that a referendum on the issue would pass. Zbogar explained that recent polls indicated that more than 60% of the public supports the arbitration agreement and that this number was growing. Most Slovenes are simply happy that the two countries "are moving on" with their bilateral relationship, according to the FM. Zbogar noted that there was no immediate rush for Slovenia's Parliament to ratify the accord, as the arbitration tribunal would not start its work until after Croatia signed its EU accession agreement. Slovenia's Constitutional Court is expected to complete its review by mid March, Zbogar said, adding that there was little doubt the Court would find the agreement constitutional. Zbogar told the CODEL that he expects Croatia to conclude its accession negotiations by the end of the year. PM Pahor thanked the U.S. "for helping us reach agreement with Croatia." Voinovich had a 10-minute telephone conversation with former PM Jansa, an "old friend" of the Senator and the leading opponent of the arbitration agreement. Despite the friendly tone of the conversation, Voinovich left no doubt that the U.S. saw this agreement as being in the best interests of Slovenia, Croatia and the larger region.

KOSOVO: SLOVENIA COMMITTED TO SECURITY

7.(C) Senator Voinovich asked about troop reductions in Kosovo. Defense Minister Jelusic said that it was very important for the international community to coordinate troop reductions in Kosovo with what was happening on the political scene, warning that there are sources of conflict that remain. Slovenia currently has 370 troops in KFOR; these soldiers will be replaced by a fresh contingent of 350 that will become more flexible and take responsibility for a broader region of the country. Jelusic noted that Slovenian troops could provide security for monasteries and Serbian enclaves in the north. In response to a question from Senator Voinovich, Jelusic said that the international community must have contingency plans for dealing with the upcoming ICJ decision on Kosovo's independence. In the meantime, the defense minister stressed the importance of having Kosovars take local ownership of the justice system, police forces and Kosovo Security Force (KSF). Kosovo needs to recruit troops from all nationalities, as well as improve the professionalism of its forces. Jelusic suggested that the Slovene Armed Forces (SAF) could provide a good model to the Kosovars, particularly in the area of its expertise in natural disaster response.

MACEDONIA

8.(C) FM Zbogar lamented that progress has been at a standstill for Macedonia due to its name dispute with Greece. In December 2009, the EU Council of Ministers postponed granting Macedonia a start date for its accession negotiations until mid-2010. As a result, according to Zbogar, Slovenia believes it is important to find a solution to the name issue before June. Zbogar warned that if a solution was not found within this timeframe, Macedonia's situation would become more complicated especially with regard to its Albanian population. PM Pahor recently traveled to Skopje to encourage the Macedonians to find a compromise solution. While the IC needs to be cognizant of Macedonian sensitivities, Zbogar told the CODEL that it was important that the Macedonians also avoid additional actions that could further provoke the Greeks.

BRDO SUMMIT

LJUBLJANA 00000041 003 OF 003

19. (C) Pahor sketched an ambitious agenda for the March 20 "Brdo Summit" co-sponsored by Slovenia and Croatia, to include progress on three issues: reform in Bosnia, reconciliation between Serbia and Kosovo and the Macedonian name issue. Pahor expects leaders of all the former Yugoslav republics and Albania to attend, as well as Spanish President Zapatero and EU High Rep Catherine Ashton, among others. The U.S. has been invited as an observer. Voinovich bluntly warned Pahor that his government "will have to do a lot of homework to make sure it doesn't blow up." Pahor grimaced and backpedaled slightly, noting that the purpose of the summit was really "to keep European attention on the Balkans" and develop initiatives within the region to deal with practical matters such as trade and energy security.

NATO AND DEFENSE ISSUES

10.(C) Defense Minister Jelusic conveyed to the Senators her appreciation for the United States' support of Slovenia's NATO membership, its military reforms and deployments in the Western Balkans and Afghanistan. Regarding Slovenia's contributions to the ISAF mission in Afghanistan, Jelusic told the CODEL that the GOS needs to further develop its public relations strategy as the public and press debate Slovenia's mission there. The Defense Minister noted that there was a large perception gap between what Slovenia was doing in Herat and what the public read about Afghanistan in the newspapers. Jelusic conveyed her appreciation for

Embassy Ljubljana's assistance in this area, calling the support "incredibly important." She noted that PD support from the Embassy and training support from the Colorado National Guard (CONG) were key to the successful October 2010 deployment of Slovenia's Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team (OMLT) in Herat Province. Voinovich also used a pull-aside with Zbogor to ask for Slovenian assistance in closing Guantanamo, to which Zbogor replied that the government was actively seeking a way under Slovenian law to accept one or more detainees.

MANAGEMENT ISSUES

¶11. (SBU) At an informal Country Team dinner, Embassy staff thanked Senator Voinovich for his personal engagement in support of overseas comparability pay and both Senators for their support of the State Department generally. Voinovich asked Country Team members for their views on human resources policy, specifically regarding the coming surge of new hires.

CDA mentioned the presentation by Deputy Secretary Lew at the EUR Chief of Missions Conference in January, in which the Deputy Secretary outlined how the QDDR would address recruitment and training. Voinovich also asked about Civil Service excursion tours in light of the difficulty filling some overseas positions, making it clear that he felt the process for excursion tours should be streamlined.

COMMENT

12.(C) Senator Voinovich acknowledged that he was grooming Senator Shaheen, the chair of the European subcommittee of the SFRC, to take the mantle of the Senate's "Balkan expert" when he retires next year. Both Senators were engaged and in good spirits. They seemed generally pleased with U.S. policy and Slovenia's role in the region. Planning for the ICJ ruling was a recurring theme for Voinovich, as was the need to support Tadic. Voinovich departed Slovenia with some apparent doubts about the Administration's policy on MAP for Bosnia, though these concerns may have been assuaged when he got to Sarajevo. They -- and we -- felt that Pahor's ambitions for the Brdo Summit may exceed his/Slovenia's capacity, but the mere fact that Slovenia and Croatia were co-sponsoring the event was a good sign and should be supported. Voinovich said he would speak with "Jones" upon his return to Washington, but did not indicate whether he was referring to General or Stu. End comment.

13.(U) CODEL Voinovich did not have the opportunity to review this message.

FREDEN